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ABSTRACT

The Speech Communication Association's National Project on Speech Communication Competencies yielded a developmental perspective of functional communication, from which implications for lifelong learning can be derived. The project resulted in the following contributions: a definition of communication competence; a description of the child as a unique kind of communicator; an understanding of the central thread of communication development and of the complexity of that development; the recognition of variables, other than age, that are related to development; and a focus on the classroom as a communication context. The goal of lifelong learning programs is to enhance and expand learning opportunities for all social groups and ages, especially workers, urban youth, women, and older adults. With regard to lifelong learning, the developmental perspective for functional communication implies a need to examine how communication competence changes beyond adolescence, a need to examine the communication dimensions of multiple educational contexts, a need to examine the communicative demands of different roles that interact with the student role, and a need to prepare parenting programs that will enhance children's development of communication competence. (GT)

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A DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE FOR FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION:
IMPLICATIONS FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

by

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PURPOSE

In this paper my purpose is to present implications for lifelong learning that can be derived from a developmental perspective of functional communication. The developmental perspective emerged from several years of work on the SCA's National Project on Speech Communication Competencies. Impetus for this Project was provided by two convictions widely held by speech communication scholars and teachers: (1) that functional speech communication behaviors are of such crucial significance that they must be emphasized progressively and continuously throughout the school experience; and (2) that our nation's schools have largely ignored the functional communication needs of children and youth. The purpose of the project was to identify the most fruitful directions for the development of speech communication instruction in the schools.

The Project was completed in three stages: collection, review and analysis of previous and original data on communication development and teacher expectations; synthesis of the data to provide guidelines for developing instructional programs in speech communication; and implementation of the guidelines in the form of a sample curriculum for pre-kindergarten through the twelfth grade. Results of the

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project are reported fully in three publications.¹ I will review only highlights that are most pertinent to our focus on lifelong learning today.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL PERSPECTIVE OF FUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION

First, the project resulted in a definition of communication competence. That definition states that communication competence involves an awareness of the transactions that occur between people. Departing from the linguistic concept that knowledge and performance are different but complementary constructs, our conceptualization ties competence to performance of language in social contexts. We see competence as characterized by four features: (1) a repertoire of communication acts that are appropriate to a variety of situations; (2) ability to select from the repertoire the most appropriate and effective acts for a given situation; (3) ability to implement the choice -- to carry it into action -- through verbal and nonverbal ways; and (4) ability to evaluate the outcomes of the choice, to assess the consequences in terms of its appropriateness to the communication context, and its interpersonal effectiveness, i.e., its satisfaction to the child and to others. Developmentally and pedagogically, all of these features characterize competence but given the very basic notion that "competence implies action, changing the environment as well as adapting to it," the last feature -- evaluating the outcomes -- is the most central to development.²

Another part of the definition of communication competence is the uses or functions of communication in daily interaction. We recognized that classifying communication functions is arbitrary to a degree, but the data, allowed us to identify five large families

of functions: controlling, sharing feelings, informing, ritualizing, and imagining. Controlling involves acts where the participants' dominant purpose is to control behavior, i.e., commanding, offering, refusing. Feeling involves acts in which the dominant purpose is to express an affective response, i.e., taunting, commiserating, tale-telling. Informing involves acts where the dominant purpose is to offer or seek information, i.e., questioning, answering, naming, explaining. Ritualizing involves acts that serve primarily to maintain social relationships and facilitate social interaction, i.e., greeting, taking leave, taking turns in conversation. Imagining involves acts that cast participants in imaginary situations, i.e., fantasizing, speculating, theorizing, dramatizing.

A second contribution of the project is its descriptions of: the child as a unique kind of communicator; the central thread of communication development; and the complexity of that development. First, we have an appreciation for what the child can do relatively early. We see the child arriving at school with ability to use conventionalized verbal moves; to create a state of mutual involvement; to sustain talk for short periods of time; to maintain order and follow rules of conversation; to employ psychological appeals; to integrate verbal with nonverbal strategies; to pursue goals while keeping another in a bound relationship; and to adopt persuasive strategies to different listeners. Noting this we must not be too eager to push the child beyond his/her present limits for those limits already serve the child well. So we see a need to permit children to be themselves, to interact with other children, to learn from their environment, to enjoy the present. As Connolly and Bruner indicate, "the years before maturity are not simply a training

ground; childhood (itself) has. . .an intrinsic value for the individual."⁴

Beyond this appreciation there is an understanding of competence as a growing phenomenon. We see shifts from egocentric to nonegocentric constructs; from talk anchored to the activity of the moment to solely verbal interaction; from concrete to abstract modes of cognizing others' behavior; from global to differentiated interpretations, constructs and strategies; from responding to the literal and perceptual aspects of intervention to interpreting the psychological details. We see evidence of the central thread of the continuity of development, of Werner's orthogenetic principle:

Organisms are naturally directed towards a series of transformations reflecting a tendency to move from a state of relative globality and undifferentiatedness towards states of increasing differentiation and hierarchic integration.³

With this central thread we also see some nuances of development that warrant further study. We note that childhood is complex, as is the process of maturation, for it is not necessarily characterized by discrete types of behavior. As children mature they are better able to conceptualize the sense of their own and other's actions. So, for one example, to describe a preschool child's uses of language as egocentric and the middle school child's or adolescent's as sociocentric is to oversimplify developmental processes. As Elkind points out, one can find different forms of egocentrism through adolescence.⁵ And one can also find traces of sociocentrism in early childhood. So we ought not focus merely on so-called "child-like" behaviors that are distinguishable from "adult-like" behaviors. We must focus

on ways to comfortably facilitate the transitional features of communication between the two.⁶

The complexities of describing the growth of competence are due in part to variables, other than age, that are related to development. This observation, I believe, is a third contribution of the project. While we described age related trends in learning verbal and nonverbal communication codes and how these codes are used, we also describe cultural and other influences on development. Thus, we emphasize that the family teaches communication; the peer group teaches communication; culture teaches communication. For some children family communication patterns coincide with those of larger units of society, but for others, communication roles and norms (and some aspects of the code) learned at home differ from those of the larger culture. So broad scaled intervention programs, such as the schooling experience, will not seek to make all children behave in similar ways in given situations. Instead, they will enable all children to perceive what is likely to be appropriate in given situations within given cultures. Communication skills will be learned from a pluralistic rather than a right/wrong model.

A fourth contribution⁶ of our developmental perspective of functional communication is its focus on the classroom as a communication context, the teacher's influence in that context, and working assumptions that, we believe, should guide educators in developing programs of deliberate learning. We emphasize that the classroom is a social system and, to the extent that teachers are primary caretakers of children in that system, the teacher sets classroom routine, socializes children into roles and norms, orients children to modes of acquiring information and values, controls focus of attention and

topic of talk, influences not only academic by personal and social dimensions of learning, governs kinds and amount of interaction and establishes parameters for building relationships with others. Moreover, teachers must account for differences that obtain between competencies learned in the classroom and competencies learned in other contexts (e.g., the street, playground, home) as well as for differences that obtain between incidental learning on the one hand and deliberately planned programs on the other.

From these observations we propose five assumptions to guide the development of instructional programs in communication:

- (1) Communication educators are primarily interested in the pragmatics of communication.
- (2) Communication competency is not tied to competency in a particular form of language.
- (3) Communication behaviors of children can be modified.
- (4) Communication educators should be child-centered in their educational prescriptions.
- (5) Communication instruction should emphasize the interactive nature of communication.

I believe these four major contributions have implications for lifelong learning. But before stating these implications, I need to clarify the principal features of lifelong learning.

LIFELONG LEARNING⁷

Lifelong learning refers to the process by which individuals continue to develop their knowledge, skills, and attitudes over their lifetimes. It includes activities or programs which nurture

lifelong learning, but its focus is more on the learner and learning than on the program. Rather than emphasizing youth and schooling alone, lifelong learning is concerned with the middle and later stages of life -- learning to advance careers, to cope with change, to develop new skills, to serve family needs, to develop personally and, in general, to lead fuller lives.

Ideally, a society committed to lifelong learning is composed of three elements: the individual, the community, and government. Individual development over the lifespan suggests that children must explore their world; adolescents must understand physical and emotional changes and must make the transition to work and economic independence; and adults must cope with career renewal and change, with changing sexuality, with aging and with death. The community has the task of creating programs for the unserved and for linking learners with resources and programs that already exist. And the government -- local, state and federal -- has the task of developing policy strategies which enhance individual growth and enrich learning opportunities.

So lifelong learning extends well beyond classroom walls -- or at least traditional classroom walls. It includes adult basic education, continuing education, job training, parent education, education for the retired and older people, remedial education and independent study. All deliberate learning is included whether it occurs in the workplace, the home, the formal or informal organization, or through the self-directed efforts of the individual.

Focusing on the adult years, lifelong learning emphasizes special needs of four particular groups: workers, urban youth, women and older adults.

For many, work and schooling have not been linked. School is seen as an influence on one's self-esteem and competence, while work is central to economic survival. So, one challenge is to close the gap between education and work by improving work related experience through the educational system, by improving learning opportunities in the work place, and by linking both systems -- school and work -- to support continual human development and life transitions. Thus, the shifts from adolescence to economic adulthood, from career to career, and from work to retirement will be made easier with educational support.

Urban youth, frequently the least educated members of our society, face the most difficulty in lifelong learning. Socialized into despair, these members have frequently given up their potential for exercising power over their future lives. The classroom that attempted to equip them with abstract skills, succeeded only in developing low self-esteem. Lifelong learning can help these youngsters by blending learning and doing, by uniting academics with work experience -- for money, exploration, personal development and training. So changing the nature of the school experience is one possible solution. And another is to make learning more accessible after leaving school.

Women also face barriers as learners -- barriers based on sex bias, stereotyping and discrimination. Yet, women are heading more households alone, are increasingly entering the labor force, and are increasingly fulfilling multiple roles such as worker, head-of-household, and single parent. Lifelong learning for women should lead to expanded career options, recognition of skills learned informally (e.g., management, accounting, diplomatic skills, learned

through volunteer work), and reducing isolation that many women experience.

Older adults are also victims of stereotyping and ageism. A better understanding is needed of the individual differences among older persons and of the socioeconomic differences between one age cohort and another. The education system has failed to meet the needs of older persons; it has neglected helping these persons deal with the stresses of human development in the later years of life; and it has failed to help older persons learn new skills or adapt old ones.

The goal of lifelong learning, then, is to enhance and expand learning opportunities for all social groups and ages in American society. Lifelong learning is a movement that views present social arrangements of society as either insufficient for or impediments to individual enrichment through deliberate, sustained learning.

IMPLICATIONS

Given the developmental perspective of functional communication described previously and a new national commitment to lifelong learning, what implications can be drawn? There are at least four implications, all of which derive from the presumption that the development of ability in functional communication ought to be as integral a part of lifelong learning as it is a part of learning in the early childhood and adolescent years.

First, there is a need to extend our understanding of how communication competence grows and changes beyond childhood and adolescence. I said earlier that the essence of competence is action -- changing our environment and adapting to it. But the

bulk of research on how we develop communication competence has focused on childhood and adolescence. Even within this seventeen year age span, we have more data about the childhood than the adolescent years. Research about communication in adulthood is scarce, at least research that synthesizes knowledge about the continued growth of competence.

When one considers the number of learners in a learning society alone, our emphasis on the pre-primary through secondary school years is apparent. With this age span as its focus, the SCA project provides instructional guidelines for approximately 52 million of society's learners. This is less than half of the total 115.8 million learners that are included in lifelong learning. What of the remaining 63.8 million learners most of whom are 18 and older?

In our concern for the development of communication competence, our preoccupation with the young child almost suggests that competence is achieved rather early and that whatever else happens after that is something other than competence. For example, Larson states:

Holding to the competence tradition for describing adults, or even high school students would ignore what seems,...an apparent and reasonable premise. Communicative competence, that is, the ability to demonstrate a knowledge of the socially appropriate communicative behavior in a given situation, is so necessary a property that without it, individuals are likely to be 'weeded out,' institutionalized, separated and managed differently. Autonomously functioning adults are almost certain to 'possess'

communicative competence. Therefore, as conceived presently, the construct has less and less utility as the individuals we are describing get older and older.⁸

The more utilitarian construct for adults, according to Larson, is effectiveness, or determination of how well individuals communicate.

On the other hand, if competence includes behavior in a given situation and if that situation is created and interpreted by the process of communication, then one's ability to co-create and co-maintain meaning systems is integral to the concept of communication competence. Harris offers this very hypotheses and extends it to suggest multiple levels of competence. Two of her levels most germane to my point are:

Satisfactory competence - the individual is capable of functioning at the age appropriate motor skill, information processing skill, etc., level as well as able to function appropriately within the rules of given episode of the system.

Optimal competence - the individual is capable of functioning at the satisfactory level of competence and can also choose his/her relationship to the system. This is one who can decide whether to act satisfactorily competent, or one can decide to deviate from the system. So, any deviation is by choice rather than by inability.⁹

Both Larson and Harris offer plausible views of competence. But

I doubt that we can accept either view now because we lack a systematic data base for describing the communication behavior changes that occur in adulthood. For example, what happens to code learning? If the semantic systems develops throughout the lifespan, study of this development would seem especially relevant for lifelong learning. What happens to role-taking? If there are traces of egocentrism in adolescence, but in a different form than in childhood, might there be still different forms of egocentrism during the work years and still other forms during the older adult period? What happens to the dominant uses of communication? Do we share feelings less and control or inform more as we age? Do we imagine more? Do new uses replace former ones? What happens to our abilities to select and evaluate communication strategies? Do these change with age? If we, as students and teachers of communication are to take lifelong learning seriously, we would do well to extend our study of the growth of competence to account for changing communication behaviors throughout various stages of adulthood. Such an extension will help us to understand further age related factors of communication, the utility of competence as a lifelong construct, and the nature of lifelong learning programs that best serve society's adult learners.

A second implication pertains to the multiple contexts for lifelong learning. In the SCA project our primary concern was with the classroom as a communication context. We couldn't help but notice the differences between the kinds of communicative behaviors that are needed for successful classroom learning and these behaviors that may be needed on the street, in the home or on the playground. We were also hesitant to characterize all classrooms as comprising one kind of communication context. Surely "the classroom" as a

communication context is an abstraction of many different teachers interacting in a variety of ways about numerous topics with different groups of children. So it is possible to think in terms of different classroom situations. But one cannot escape schooling as a unique environment for deliberate learning. And this environment has received most of our attention in curriculum planning and implementation. Yet the very nature of lifelong learning forces us to examine other learning contexts, i.e., the home, private industry, community organizations, extension and continuing education programs, city recreation departments, congregate housing for older adults, etc. What are the communication characteristics of deliberate learning programs in these multiple contexts? What communicative demands do they place on the lifelong learner? How do these demands affect learning purposes, motivation, and learning styles? From our examination of these multiple learning contexts, perhaps we can maximize a transition from schooling to education as the most desirable learning environment.

A third implication pertains to the relation of one's role to communication and learning. Insofar as schooling is concerned, the child's primary role is student. That role demands some particular kinds of communication competencies if the child is to succeed. But in lifelong learning there are multiple, but still primary, roles, e.g., worker-as-learner, urban youth-as-learner, woman-as-learner, and older adult-as-learner. If lifelong learning opportunities generated by individuals, community resources, and governmental policies are better linked (and such linkage is an important feature of lifelong learning), then the learning programs will be integrated

more with work, family living, public performance, and social organizations. The communicative demands placed upon learners with multiple roles would be complex. Yet extending our understanding of these demands beyond the student role, and understanding how the communicative demands of the student role are related to the communicative demands of other roles are essential if communication is to be functional in lifelong learning.

The three implications discussed so far are concerned with the adult as a developing communicator in a broader learning context that requires integration of multiple roles. There is one final implication that remains consistent with the focus of the SCA project. This implication pertains to the caretakers and caretaking of children. In our developmental project of functional communication competence, we addressed the needs of children that can be met by the classroom teacher. The teacher was the caretaker we had in mind when we derived a pedagogical framework. But lifelong learning mandates that we address the special problems of other caretakers -- single parents, working mothers, fathers who are taking on more responsibility for childrearing, grandparents. These people are primary resources of communication learning in children. Yet they go about their teaching role in a largely unconscious way. Lifelong learning programs aimed specifically at competence in parenting and at communication as the core of that competence will greatly enhance the development of communication competence in the child. The responsibility for designing such programs rests squarely with those of us in SCA who see lifelong learning and the development of functional communication competence as central concerns in Communication Education.

In summary, our developmental perspective for functional communication implies for lifelong learning a need to examine how communication competence changes beyond adolescence, a need to examine the communication dimensions of multiple educational contexts, a need to examine the communicative demands of different roles that interact with the student role, and a need to prepare parenting programs that will enhance the development of communication competence in the child.

ENDNOTES

1. The first two stages -- data review and analysis and synthesis -- are reported in R.P. Allen and Kenneth L. Brown (eds.), Developing Communication Competence in Children (Skokie, Ill.: National Textbook Co., 1976). The implementation stage is reported in Barbara Sundene Wood (ed.), Development of Functional Communication Competencies: Pre-K - Grade 6 (Urbana, Ill.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, 1977) and Barbara Sundene Wood (ed.), Development of Functional Communication Competencies: Grades 7-12 (Urbana, Ill.: ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills, 1977).
2. Connolly, Kevin and Jerome Bruner, "Competence: Its Nature and Nurture," in Keven Connolly and Jerome Bruner (eds.), The Growth of Competence (New York: Academic Press, 1974), pp. 3-7.
3. Werner, H., and Kaplan, E., Symbol Formation: An Organismic-developmental Approach to Language and the Expression of Thought (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1963), p. 7.
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6. Johnson, F.L., "Role-taking and Communicative Ability: Are They Related?" Unpublished paper presented at annual meeting of Speech Communication Association, 1974.
7. Information in this section is derived from Lifelong Learning and Public Policy, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1978.

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9. Harris, Linda, "Communication Competence: An Argument for a Systemic View." Unpublished paper, Department of Communication Studies, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, 1978.